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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000390

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT'S NEW TIFA LEAD SAYS COPYRIGHT LAW WILL GO  
TO PARLIAMENT SOON

Classified By: Economic Officer Chris Green for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) On March 13, Econcouns and Econoff met with new Assistant Undersecretary of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) for International Trade Abdulazziz Al-Khalidi. Al-Khalidi, who was previously Assistant U/S for Commercial Control and a key contact on IPR issues, took over in January as the GOK's lead official in the TIFA process, replacing Hamid Al-Ghanim. Khaled Al-Azemi, Controller of Foreign Relations at MOCI and a member of Al-Khalidi's staff, also attended the meeting. Econcouns congratulated Al-Khalidi on his new position, stressed we looked forward to working with him on trade issues, and noted that the USG still eagerly seeks movement on several important TIFA items, including IPR, taxes, labor, and standards. Al-Khalidi said much of the progress will depend on the Parliament, to which new tax and labor laws have been submitted.

Copyright Law Almost Done  
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¶2. (SBU) Al-Khalidi said amendments to Kuwait's copyright law are nearly finished, and he expects them to be submitted to the Parliament within two months. The amendments, he said, will include new provisions for copyright enforcement by Kuwait Customs, increased penalties, and a provision making the seizure of pirated goods mandatory for IPR inspectors. He believes the amendments will make the new law TRIPS-compliant. Al-Azemi predicted that the law would pass easily in Parliament since the provisions were not particularly controversial, although Al-Khalidi said he "wasn't sure" how Parliament would treat it. Al-Khalidi said he had traveled to Geneva recently to meet with WTO copyright experts, and asked for a WTO training program to be held in Kuwait.

Econoff Tip Spurs IPR Raid  
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¶3. (SBU) During the meeting Al-Azemi stated that vendors no longer sell pirated goods openly in Kuwait, and that transactions now involve customers choosing goods from vendors' catalogues and a runner retrieving the goods from another location. Econoff disputed the claim, noting that pirated DVDs, software, and video games were sold openly in a shopping plaza adjacent to his residence. Al-Khalidi asked for details of the location, and immediately made a phone call to MOCI inspectors ordering them to inspect the shopping plaza. Two days later, on March 15, Econoff went to the shopping center and saw that all vendors, including their semi-permanent glass cases, had been removed.

Comment

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¶4. (C) Al-Khaldi was previously the Commerce Ministry's lead official on IPR enforcement, and has long been a good Embassy contact. He is one of a small cadre of GOK officials who are aggressive on IPR, and although he is no longer directly responsible for enforcement, he continues to take a great interest in the issue. While he was less familiar with other TIFA issues, having just recently assumed the portfolio, Al-Khaldi should be a dependable ally within the ministry for pushing the TIFA agenda once he gets up to speed.

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